

RECKLESS RALPH'S

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP



A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

Published by Ralph F. Cummings, Box 75, Fisherville, Mass., U. S. A.

Price \$2.00 per year

Ad Rates: 5c per word, 75c per inch, quarter page \$2.00, half page \$3.00, full page \$5.00. Four times for the price of three.

Vol. 17

April 1949

No. 199



THE PRIZE PLOT STORY

by George T. Flaum

It has been some time since anything about Frank Merriwell has appeared in the columns of the Dime Novel Roundup. The writer, who owns a set of the famous Tip-Top Library and Weekly felt that it would prove not only interesting but a contribution to the history of this series of Americana to eliminate some of the misunderstanding which appears to exist about a little-known episode in the life of this juvenile hero. The story he has in mind appeared in number sixty-six of Tip Top Weekly back in 1897

and was never reprinted. It is entitled "Prize Plot Story; Frank Merriwell As The Star or Trouble In Junior Theatricals."

Some collectors have expressed the opinion that Gilbert Patten was not the author. Whether this contention is correct can not now be verified with any degree of accuracy and the evidence we are about to present would seem to dispute this opinion. Patten is gone and we can only rely upon the earlier issues of the weekly for our answer.

On page twenty-nine of Tip Top Library number forty-four, entitled "Frank Merriwell's Game; or Snaring the Sharpers," we find our first reference to the prize plot contest. The announcement reads in part as follows: "A Novel Prize Contest. Wanted —A Plot. A famous author once gave an aspiring young writer this advice: 'My son, the true secret in authorship is in having something to write about. Never take up your pen without your plot is formed.' Plot making is not the least part of story writing. To encourage those readers who have literary ambitions, the Tip Top Weekly offers a prize of five dollars in gold for the best plot for a Frank Merriwell story sent in on or before March 13, 1897."

The conditions of the contest were that the plot must not contain over five hundred words. The subject was left to the choice of the competitor but Frank Merriwell must be the hero.

Reference to the contest was made in subsequent issues and in number fifty-two Tip Top, the winner was declared to be Harry S. Adair of McConnelsville, Ohio. In awarding Adair

the five dollars in gold, the editors commented that the success of the contest had been phenomenal and said that the number of plots sent in by the readers had run into the thousands. They declared that the task of reading them had taken considerable time, but that each and every plot had received careful attention.

The many readers of the weekly must have wondered if the editors had forgotten the story for it wasn't until thirteen issues later that reference was made to it again. On page twenty-nine of Tip Top number sixty-five there appeared a one paragraph announcement in plain type informing the readers that in the next week's issue the famous "Prize Plot Story" would be published. A rare treat was promised and assurance was given that everyone would be well repaid for their long wait.

On Saturday, July 17th, 1897, number sixty-six of Tip Top Weekly containing the story appeared on the newsstand. The copy we have before us is as new in appearance as the day it was bought nearly fifty-two years ago and a brief description of the attractive cover and inside title page should prove of interest.

The words Tip Top Weekly are printed in large blue letters on a two-tone orange and pink background. The three words "Prize Plot Story" are inscribed in large orange-tinted block letters. Underneath is the caption "Frank Merriwell As The Star." In the lower left hand corner of the cover appears the sub-title "Trouble In Junior Theatricals." The scene shows Frank on the stage of a theatre dressed in a yellow and orange medieval costume. He is falling through an open trap-door in the stage flooring while two members of the cast rush forward with outstretched arms to prevent what appears to be certain injury. Below the picture is the explanation: "The floor gave way like a flash and down Frank fell."

On the title page is a two line credit notation which I will quote exactly as it appears. It is, "(Written by Mr. Burt L. Standish after a plot submitted by Harry S. Adair, of McConnellsville, Ohio, winner of the prize in the Tip Top Weekly Plot Contest.)"

From the above it would appear that Gilbert Patten was the author of this

issue of the weekly, although, of course we have no definite means of knowing that he did or did not write the story. But, the style is Patten's and it is this writer's opinion that he was the author. If additional evidence is needed, we quote from Cutler's "Gilbert Patten and His Frank Merriwell Saga," published by the University of Maine in 1934. (Maine Bulletin; vol. 36; number 10).

Writing of the author's early experiences, Cutler said, "The first two years were most difficult. He had no regular hours, no systematic method of study or writing; he sat down to his typewriter at any hours of the day or night and ground away. Indeed, there were many times when he finished the installment barely in time for the last mail to New York."

"In 1898, after the writing of the story that appeared in sixty-six Tip Top, Patten returned to New York where he then developed a routine that made his work easier. He employed a stenographer to save his fingers, which were bruised by the incessant hammering on the typewriter, and tried dictating which became his salvation." According to Cutler, there was a period of five months in 1900 when John H. Whitson took over the work in order to give the author opportunity for another project. But by this time all the earlier Tip Tops had been written and published.

For the benefit of those who may not have the opportunity to read the Prize Plot Story, I will give a brief condensation. The story begins in Jack Diamond's room. A dozen or more students are sitting about listening to him play the piano. Jack displays considerable ability and his rendition of a stirring piece of his own composition meets with immediate acclaim among the listeners. With the group is a pale, serious looking student, Barry Latimer, who suggests it is just the stuff needed for the proposed opera which is to be given for the benefit of the crew. Latimer, who has written some first-rate verse for the college paper, agrees to do the lyrics. At this point Frank strolls into the room and assures the group that permission has been secured from the faculty to put on the show.

The opera is to be called "Prince Ningolbinger," and is supposed to rep-

resent the adventures of a foreign nobleman who comes to America to get his education at "Yale" college. There is a chorus and lots of solos and all the characters in the play are to be disguised copies of real persons. Bruce Browning is appointed stage manager and it is at this point that a self-conceited fellow named Hartley Simms enters the story. He is known to be a good singer and it is on this account, as much as anything else, that he was invited to become a member of the cast. Simms had expected to be cast in the lead and is greatly disgusted when it is given to Frank. However, he agrees to act as Frank's understudy.

Simms leaves and shortly afterward Jack Diamond discovers that some of the sheet music containing his compositions is lost. A search fails to reveal the missing music and Frank suspecting the truth, hurries from the room promising to get it if he can. He hurries to Simms' room and discovers the missing music burning in the fireplace. Simms admits his guilt and begs for mercy and Frank leaves. Simms remains in the cast.

Rehearsals go along smoothly and eventually the performance is given before a capacity audience of the students and their friends.

During the show, Harry Rattleton becomes suspicious of Simms and overhears him plotting with Taylor, a stage hand, to spring the trap in the stage floor so that Frank will be injured and he (Simms) will then be called to substitute. Harry confers with Bruce Browning and both dash out on the stage just in time to catch Frank as he is falling through the opening. Frank is saved from injury and the opera goes on to its triumphant end.

As the curtain goes down on the final act it is discovered that the scene room is on fire. Bruce and Frank, along with Taylor the stage-hand, finally put the blaze out but not before the man is saved by Frank from being seriously burnt. Later, Taylor, grateful to Frank for having saved his life, tells about his arrangement with Simms to spring the trap-door so the concealed actor could play the part instead of Frank. Bruce and Frank go to Simms' quarters and have a talk with him. A few days later he leaves college never to return.

NEWSY NEWS

by Ralph F. Cummings

I am making up the Roundup early this time, March 23rd, as I won't be home the 28th, so will do it now, and any ads that come in after today, will appear in the May number, as a very dear friend of mine, and subscriber to the Roundup, Mrs. Marie L. Bendig, 1122 So. 48th St., W. Phila., 43, Pa. died the afternoon of March 19th. The funeral is Thursday at 2:30 p.m. and I plan to be there. All you advertisers will understand. And you know, once in Philadelphia, I'll be lucky if I get away with a whole skin, as you all know how it is when brother meets brother.

George French, 121 W. Passaic Ave., Bloomfield, N. J., just entered the hospital, for an operation on glands, so we all wish him the best of luck.

Any orders that come in, will be filled on my return from Phila., in a couple of weeks or so.

Fred Lee reports that the mother of Joseph J. Myler has just passed away, God bless her, and Mrs. Bendig too. I lost my dear mother in Oct. 1945 and I know how you all feel.

We hear that Bro. Robert McDowell of Uniontown, Pa., visited with Bill Glaggett of Jacksonville, Fla., and Roy Swanstraum of Bristol, Minn., visited George Flaum of St. Petersburg, Fla.

Linn's Weekly Stamp News, Vol. 15 No. 41, whole No. 739, Dec. 31st, 1942 had an article "Shades of Old King Brady and Nick Carter Hover Over Censors."

Did you know that Buffalo Bill and his Adventures as King of the Border Men, by Ned Buntline, appeared in Vol. 8, No. 99 of Good Reading, a monthly magazine of Choice Fiction, and published by A. D. Porter Co., 52-58 Duane St., New York, N. Y., May, 1901.

Don S. Learnard, 23 Russell Terrace, has just got out of the hospital, after being in there 3 or 4 weeks with sacroiliac trouble, and then he had an operation on top of everything else, glad you are back home, Pard, and that you are feeling like a new man now.

Bill Burns fine article on the New York Weekly starts in the May issue of Roundup, it is a fine meaty article,

and it will be worthy of any ones reading.

Leitheads Ted Strong in March issue was a fine one, also Flaums article in this number makes some of us sit up, and think back to the old days, when that Prize Plot story first appeared.

In Golden Hours, No. 736, March 8, 1902, page 18, there is a page called The Junior, and there is a fine picture of one of our members when he was around 27 years old. Willis E. Hurd, 2500-22nd St., N. Arlington, Va. (H. H. Bro. Member No. 16.) Title is: Gallery of Golden Hours Authors, No. 8. Willis Edwin Hurd, and his life up to that time.

Ye editor Cummings wants "A Bogus Clew" #205 of Magnet Detective Library. State how much is wanted.

Bro. members who passed to the Great Beyond in 1948.

Jan. 7th, George H. Cordier
March 10th, H. P. Palmer
June 1st, Mrs. F. Hausman
June 15th, Harold C. Holmes

HEROES OF YESTERYEAR

by Nameless Joe
the Terror of Shootin Canyon

Ah fellers, brethren of ye Happy Hours Brotherhood, you fellers who read them thar blood soaked pages in the early days I greet you. How well I reccomember my own days hidin in the barn and picturing myself going through those adventures, shooting vilians, knifin Indians, yes, now that I'm sporting a big long beard and smokin me long pipe it sure takes me back.

Howsoever with all the big boys, my two favorites were Frank Merriwell and Fred Fearnott, along with their pals, always on hand to help out where help was needed, otherwise how could the author finish the story.

Now take Fearnott fer instance, thar was a lad. He could outshoot, outwrastle, and outsmart anybody and everybody. I seldom read one of his tales that he wasn't the only one except his partner Terry Oilcloth or sumthin who knew how to make a pot of coffee. Nobody around just knew nuthin, not as good as he did anyway. I've had quite a few years myself away out west and lived among the cowpunchers, but not once did I ever

run across one who gave such expressions as, BY George, Thunder Pard or the like. What they did say, well Hal Standish or whatever his name was just couldn't tell his little darling readers the exact quotation.

Howsoever to give the divil his due, the one outstanding writer of this type of stuff was good old Gil Patten, he really had sumthin on the ball. At least Frank did lose a game once in a while. For an author to write about one or two sets of fellers for so many years, it was an impossibility to get new plots all the time. But where Frank managed to rustle up so durn many horses that were always runnin away with his best gal in it I couldn't figger. When stuck for a plot, there was always some building that could catch fire, and it was only the effort of his typewriter to stick some beautiful maid up in a winder some place. Ladders to get there were always handy, if you gotsher typewriter.

I was also a student of Nick Carter, and the old fogey with the brass buttons and long blue coat, Old King Brady. Well those fellers always got their man, but today give me the hard hittin Fat man on the radio. Nick and Brady took almost 32 pages to do their stuff, but Fat man does it in 8 minutes, he could take the full fifteen but how ye gunna know what kinda stuff is best for your stomach if the commercial pest dont spout his wares?

Lets not skip lightly over the antics of the Diamond Dickies. Sure great fellers, but again looka the time it took. Why the Lone Ranger rounds up twice as many bad men with only Tonto, a much smaller guy than Handsome Harry to bring em all to jestice in seven minutes flat.

Young Klondike, great feller, couldnt stick his shovl into ground any place unless gold nuggets kept popping around. No wonder you don't hear any more about gold being found up there, he carted em all away. Didn't leave nuthin fer nobody.

Then we pass gently on to Fame and Misfortune Magazine. The boy heroes of Wall St. There were oddles of em, each and every one had a sick and ailing Mother or sister, too poor to buy a crumb of pie. It only took from three to four pages of readin where he overhears a couple of brokers tip themselves off on a stock that

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The following rare novels are priced for quick sale. Though complete description cannot be given, condition may be judged by price charged. Novels in long runs; the earlier numbers are priced higher than the later ones. An early number in the lower price brackets is probably taped or otherwise inferior to those in higher priced list. DO NOT EXPECT A \$3.00 novel for \$1.50. Add 10% to all orders under \$1.00 to cover postage and insurance. All novels subject to return within 5 days of receipt.

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couldnt lose. So he sticks in his two cents, and on the next two pages he comes home with enough long green to paper the dinin room, and mabe part of bath room. Then as an example, the Cutest Boy in Wall St. No 1 of that library by the way winds up marryin a millionaires daughter, and of course she was beautiful, homely ones never are allowed to enter between the outside cover and where it tells you about next week. Today these same fellers could stick their dough on any old stock and wind up living in Mulligans Flats down by the viniger wokls.

So fellers, thas how tis, we now live in a diffrent world, we ain't even got the hair we used ta have, but the memories are still there. In my later years I ran into a few dime novels again and tried to read a few, it took a superhuman effort to do so, but I did and the big thrill I got was looking at some well remembered lurid covers.

The years made me a swell present of misery and woes, so the Doc told me to take up a hobby. Being a camera fiend what better than to start a few albums and photo same. I got so hot on the subject finally I not only spent plenty on materials but covered many miles borrowin and swipin all I could get me hands on. The members who helped me were such swell guys like good old Ralph Cummings, made quite a few trips up there, then there was Harold Holmes, poor fellow now underneath the daisies, the Lord rest his soul, Guinon of Little Rock, Ray Caulwell down in Lancaster. So now, I got em, what as I gunna do with em. Jest get a kick lookin em over. No doubt one of these days when I also glance up at ye daisies the entire mess will land kerplunk in some tidy ash barrell.

So if any of ye want to get a hold of some photos, perhaps books you are wondering jest what was that cover, get in touch with Ralph, mabe I have what you want, theres thousands of em, mabe I got. And this is not a com-mercial. Ralph has access to all my negatives.

Now as a suggestion gents why not write to Ralph, give him your ideas what you would like in the Roundup to keep up your interest. Ralph can't know unless you tell him. So wadda ye want, big articles, little articles, mabe a bit of humor, but keep in mind

he can't print everything, space and expense just won't allow it. For my part I like a full dept devoted to his Newsy News telling what many of youse guys have of interest to all.

Sa long.

ODDS AND ENDS

by W. B. McCafferty

The "Graphic"—the magazine section of the Chicago Sunday "Tribune" for December 3rd features an article by Stewart H. Holbrook on "Calamity Jane." The illustration accompanying the article is a picture of Jane with Scout C. S. Stobie and Capt. Jack Crawford in Western attire.

In a little brochure, now long out of print, I read the following about Thomas Bird Mosher, called "Dean of the world's book lovers," the creator and founder of the "Bibleot"—a literary treasure in many ways.

"He was born in Biddeford, Maine. Attended grammar school until thirteen, when his father took him away to sea."....When the sails were hoisted he was thinking of a barrel of dime novels which he had left behind.

This love for books engendered by the dime novels was such that his father got him a shelf of books more literary, perhaps, than his dime novels. But it was the dime novels that seems to have started him on his way to literary fame. His own life was somewhat similar to some of the heroes of the "Pluck and Luck" stories. At thirteen he was on a sail ship sailing the boundless ocean, and his words are,

"I shall never again read books as I read them in my early seafaring, when all the world was young, when the days were of tropic splendor and the long evenings were passed with my books in a lonely cabin lighted by a primitive oil lamp, while the ship was plowing through the boundless ocean on its weary course around Cape Horn."

Some time ago I ordered some books from the Union Library Association, New York City—three "Nick Carter" stories. The character known as Nick Carter in the stories is not the Nick of the long ago by any stretch of the imagination. The Nick of the old days was manly and upright—the soul of

decence and honor. Whereas the Nick of these newer tales is a little above a thug. And the manner in which he gets out of precarious situations does not have the finesse of the Nick of older times. The plot is all action. Without the shrewd craftsmanship of the older Nick, which he displayed in his matching wits with Dr. Quartz, and Dazzar the Archfiend, etc. This modern Nick is a brutal gun-slinging individual so contrary to the Nick of yesteryear that one drops the story in disgust and sighs because there is no author like those of old who made Nick Carter the legendary hero that he is.

The radio Nick Carter, I might say, is also far from the Carter so familiar to us in the Nick Carter Weekly. Imagine, if you can, Nick's assistant Patsy as a GIRL rather than the young Irish lad that we used to know in the old days. Then, too, Chickering Carter is said to be Nick's "kid brother," whereas in the old days, he was a ward of the famous sleuth.

This is the Golden anniversary of the Great Klondike Gold Rush, and in my hand is a copy of "Young Klondike's Golden Eagle." The story of Young Klondike and his friends "Working a Hidden Mine." The tale is an original, dated New York, August 31, 1898, and is No. 13 in the "Young Klondike" series.

In 1898 there were no airplanes with which to navigate the air to the frozen north, but the balloon was often thought of for such purposes. The "Andre Balloon Expedition" of 1897 is an example of this. Andre reached 83 degrees North Latitude and was lost. No more was heard of this expedition until his camp was found in 1931, thirty-four years later.

It is no small wonder then that Young Klondike should utilize the bal-

loon in getting supplies down into the hidden valley in this cold land of Alaska.

I well remember the excitement of 1898. The Spanish-American War, and the Klondike Gold Rush. These two furnished material for many a tale in the novels of the times.

Ned Golden and Dick Luckey were the heros of the Klondike tales. The principal feminine character was Miss Edith Welton; and there was, of course, Zed, "The Great Unknown," who was always about to capture his "man," but said man always turned out to be someone else. Zed, by the way, was a detective.

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